

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: NATO GR MASS US

SUBJ: MEETING WITH BITSIOS ON U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE
AND OTHER MATTERS

REF STATE 244265

1. CHARGE WAS CALLED IN BY FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS THIS EVENING FOR GENERAL DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED PROGRAM OF U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO GREECE, AS OUTLINED TO AMBASSADOR ALEXANDRAKIS BY UNDER SECRETARY SISCO (REFTEL) AND OTHER SUBJECTS ON WHICH BITSIOS SOUGHT CLARIFICATION PRIOR TO OPENING OF FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE IN GREEK PARLIAMENT OCTOBER 16. DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS JOHN TZOUNIS WAS ALSO PRESENT.

2. BITSIOS BEGAN BY SAYING THAT HE HAD READ WITH INTEREST ALEXANDRAKIS' ACCOUNT OF HIS MEETING WITH SISCO, PARTICULARLY AS IT RELATED TO SUPPORTING ASSISTANCE. GOG AND CARAMANLIS PERSONALLY APPRECIATED THE INTEREST USG WAS TAKING IN GREECE'S CURRENT FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES. IT WAS CLEAR FROM THE RECENT TRIPS THAT CARAMANLIS AND BITSIOS HAD MADE TO EUROPE THAT RELATIVELY LITTLE HELP COULD BE EXPECTED FROM THAT QUARTER. SOFT LOANS WERE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO OBTAIN AND GOG FELT THAT ONLY THE U.S. WAS IN A POSITION TO HELP GREECE RELIEVE THE STRAIN ON ITS BALANCE OF PAYMENTS WHICH WOULD SOON BE AGGRAVATED BY INCREASED PETROLEUM PRICES. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND

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BITSIOS SAID THAT CARAMANLIS HOPED THAT THE U.S.

WOULD CONSIDER RECOMMENDING TO CONGRESS ONE HUNDRED MILLION REPEAT ONE HUNDRED MILLION IN SUPPORTING ASSISTANCE LOAN RATHER THAN THIRTY MILLION MENTIONED BY SISCO.

3. CHARGE OBSERVED THAT CONGRESS DID NOT REPEAT NOT APPEAR TO BE IN A "GIVING MOOD" AND ONE HUNDRED MILLION WAS A VERY LARGE AMOUNT FOR A COUNTRY LIKE GREECE WHOSE FINANCIAL SITUATION WAS DIFFICULT BUT BY NO MEANS DESPERATE. CHARGE NOTED THAT HE AND ECONOMIC COUNSELOR BENEDICK WOULD BE SEEING COORDINATION MINISTER PAPALIGOURAS OCTOBER 17 AND ASKED WHETHER PAPALIGOURAS WOULD BE IN ANY POSITION TO PROVIDE JUSTIFICATION AND RATIONALE FOR ONE HUNDRED MILLION FIGURE.

4. BITSIOS REPLIED BY SAYING THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THE DIFFICULTIES OF SECURING SUPPORTING ASSISTANCE LOAN OF THIS MAGNITUDE BUT THAT HE, CARAMANLIS AND PAPALIGOURAS WERE IN AGREEMENT THAT NOTHING LESS THAN THIS AMOUNT WOULD ENABLE GREECE TO MEET ITS IMPENDING OBLIGATIONS. HE WAS INSTRUCTING ALEXANDRAKIS TO SEEK ANOTHER APPOINTMENT WITH SISCO TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEM FURTHER. CHARGE ASKED WHAT GOG REACTION WAS TO PROPOSED FMS CREDITS OF NINETY MILLION AND GRANT MILITARY ASSISTANCE OF SEVENTY MILLION. BITSIOS EXPRESSED GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH THESE PROPOSALS BUT SAID AGAIN THAT GOG HOPED THAT WE WOULD CONSIDER SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN SUPPORTING ASSISTANCE LOAN. CHARGE SAID THAT HE WOULD REPORT BITSIOS' REQUEST IMMEDIATELY TO WASHINGTON, BUT HE CAUTIONED BITSIOS NOT REPEAT NOT TO BE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE POSSIBILITIES. HE ADDED THAT IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF PAPALIGOURAS COULD SUPPLY ADDITIONAL JUSTIFICATION FOR ONE HUNDRED MILLION FIGURE IN OCTOBER 17 MEETING.

5. BITSIOS THEN TURNED THE CONVERSATION TO THE FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN TOMORROW, OCTOBER 16, IN PARLIAMENT. HE SAID THAT WE COULD EXPECT CARAMANLIS TO TAKE A "STRONG LINE" DEFENDING THE NEED FOR CLOSE RELATIONS WITH US AND EUROPE. MAIN LINE OF OPPOSITION ATTACK WOULD BE THAT CARAMANLIS, DESPITE HIS PUBLIC PROMISE TO WITHDRAW FROM MILITARY ARM OF NATO AND CUT

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LOOSE FROM US, HAD FAILED TO DEVELOP A TRULY NATIONAL FOREIGN POLICY. OPPOSITION LEADERS WOULD ACCUSE CARAMANLIS OF DECEPTION AND CHALLENGE HIM TO GET TOUGH WITH NATO AND US, ALLEGING THAT THE TURKS HAD DEMONSTRATED THAT THE BEST WAY TO GET ACTION FROM WASHINGTON WAS BY MEANS OF THREATS. MUCH WOULD BE MADE OF CONTINUING US SHIP VISITS TO ELEFSIS, CRETE BASES AND LEAKED REPORTS OF THEODOROPOULOS' NATO PRESENTATION. CHARGE COMMENTED

THAT GOG HAD NO REPEAT NO NEED TO BE APOLOGETIC ON ANY OF THESE SCORES. OPPOSITION CRITICISM OF THE KIND ANTICIPATED BY BITSIOS WAS BEST MET HEAD ON SINCE IT TENDED TO BE MALICIOUS AND ILL-INFORMED. IT SEEMED TO CHARGE THAT MANY PEOPLE IN GREECE WOULD WELCOME A STRONG LEAD FROM GOG SPOKESMEN IN THE FIELD OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. BITSIOS REACTED SOMEWHAT TESTILY TO THIS OBSERVATION BY SAYING THERE WAS NO LACK OF STRONG LEADERSHIP IN GREECE AND THAT CARAMANLIS HIMSELF WAS THE BEST JUDGE OF WHAT TO SAY AND HOW TO SAY IT. HE REPEATED THAT CARAMANLIS WOULD NOT REPEAT NOT HEDGE HIS STATEMENTS IN THE DEBATE WHICH, HE THOUGHT, WOULD BE COMPLETED IN ONE DAY.

6. COMMENT: WE WILL BE SEEING PAPALIGOURAS AT 10 A.M. FRIDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 17, AND WILL EXPLORE THE SUBJECT OF SUPPORTING ASSISTANCE IN GREATER DETAIL AT THAT TIME. IF THE DEPARTMENT HAS PARTICULAR POINTS TO RAISE OR QUESTIONS TO POSE THIS MEETING WOULD PROVIDE THE BEST FORUM FOR US TO DO SO. STEARNS

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